

# 'Spies Behind Pillars'

By JOY BILLINGTON  
Star Staff Writer

Life in the foreign service, among women she liked and respected like the ambassador's wife who sent a car for her and the "Mrs. Davenport" whom she loathed and disrespected, is the subject Kathleen Trautman's book "Spies Behind the Pillars, Bandits at the Pass."

The spies (foreigners) and the bandits (locals) of Afghanistan and the backbiting of a small American community abroad are four years behind her.

Her husband, Bob Trautman, is now a White House reporter for the British news agency Reuters.

Katy is about to be 40 and hard at work on another book on what it's like to feel 40 coming on.

Their house in Glen Echo gleams with mementoes of their Afghan year—pewter trays, hanging lamps and rugs.

But their sons have a newspaper route and go to the junior high up the road.

Mrs. Trautman's book (being released tomorrow) vividly encapsulates one year of their lives as well as saying something about the subject that periodically comes under scrutiny in Washington... how Americans represent their country abroad.

## Foreign Land

Kathleen Trautman was reared amid oceans of wheat in Kansas, in a whacky "commune-like" house full of adopted children and boarders, run by her grandmother. Her uncle Frank, an old seadog of a captain who looked like a Hemingway hero, was her favorite visitor and she'd beg him to take her to sea with him. "I can't, you're a girl," she was told.

Later, she viewed America with as much excitement as if it were a foreign land.

After her marriage, she and Bob lived in Kentucky, Wisconsin, Ohio, California and many other places while he worked for various agencies.

"We were always itinerates," she says with satisfaction.

"We've had so many homes."

In Washington, she worked on foreign policy research for Sen. John Sherman Cooper.

"He was one of the first doves, and he was so torn when he received many letters from Kentucky when he was up for re-election, running about eight to 10 for the Vietnam war," she recalls.

"One night, I walked into his office and he was just sitting there at his desk, the tears rolling down his cheeks. I asked what was wrong, and he said he'd just come back from Vietnam and American boys were dying there. And he didn't know what to do...."

"That was one of the most important moments of my life, to witness that man's pain. Of course he voted his conscience. He always did."

When the Trautmans arrived in Afghanistan not long after that, "the first thing I heard was that we couldn't discuss Vietnam. Now I'm very outspoken, and when I heard Russians at parties saying dreadful things about all Americans being war mongers, I was terribly torn.

"Whenever I did speak out, I'd get phone calls from other wives next day, warning me I was ruining my husband's career."

## Unbelievable

"I was an official representative of my country, but I also wanted to make the point that the one thing we have over the Russians is free speech and I wanted Afghans to know I could dissent.

Some of the anecdotes that her publisher, McKay's, cut out were on grounds of "unbelievability," like getting hauled over the coals for breaking protocol at a party when she delivered a casual message to the Prime Minister of Afghanistan from Sen. Cooper. The Prime Minister insisted on sitting by her for an hour and talking.

"I thought I was getting hauled on the carpet next day," she said.

## Abuse

"I'm so glad this abuse of wives has come out in the open and the State Department is doing something. There are so many stories. I never had to do anybody's washing. But I saw one woman (not our ambassador's wife because she and her husband were great) throw a box of chocolates on the floor because she was mad at another woman who refused to play bridge. She just said, 'pick em up.' And the woman did.

"You can get a doll, or a monster. I know another woman who had to do all the shopping for her husband's superior's wife. And later, when we got back to Washington, I heard some USIA men chatting about someone we all knew, who was leaving the agency, and one man said to the other, 'well, I guess ---'s wife finally got even.'"

She is quite aware that her book may be viewed with disdain by foreign service people.

"They'll say, here's this little pipsqueak who's only been abroad for one year writing a book. That's the difference between Bob and me. As a newsman, he has to be objective and weigh both sides of everything. I just react. That's why I was very wrong for the foreign service."

## Inflated Sense

In her book, Mrs. Trautman uses her housewifely experiences to great advantage. Her Afghan servants and their lives become important to the Trautman family.

Some foreign service wives, she says, get an inflated sense of importance when they employ their first servants.

"They will scream at their servants all day, saying how stupid and slow Afghans are, and then sit down at the head of a dinner table at night and be perfectly sweet to some Afghan guests.

She reacted against this sort of hypocrisy strongly.

have worked for such women are going to be bitter against Americans all their lives. Maybe I was too young. Maybe you can't be friends to your servants like we were..... but I thought you could."

## Not His 'Bag'

Bob Trautman finally decided foreign service was just not his "bag."

He had been assigned to Afghanistan after two years here covering the Johnson White House for USIA's wire International Press Service.

In Kabul, he was disillusioned to find himself shuffling handout policy 'interpretives' from Washington, non-news that not even the most isolated foreign newspaper would print, he says.

"It was soul-destroying and ambition-destroying kind of work."

Disillusionment set in fast for Trautman, "when I saw how much money was being spent and how little good it was doing."

## Ideal Wife

The Trautmans also believe the tradition followed in other nations' foreign services, where wives are less visible and more private in their foreign roles, is healthier than what they witnessed in Kabul.

"That American Dream version of the ideal American wife, always clean, always bright, living 'life with father and our four kids' is some sort of distorted TV image of an ideal. Nobody really lives that way," Kathleen Trautman concludes.